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HEALTH DEPARTMENT  
NEWS RELEASE



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**For additional information contact:**

**Lisa LaPlante at (616) 632-7182 or [Lisa.LaPlante@kentcountymi.gov](mailto:Lisa.LaPlante@kentcountymi.gov)**

**Bunnies, Chicks Grow Into Rabbits and Chickens**  
**Think twice about giving them to children for Easter**

GRAND RAPIDS – Spring is approaching, and many parents are starting to shop for Easter gifts for their little ones. Some will shop for baby bunnies and little chicks to give as gifts. There are several responsibilities that come with these animals, as they will grow into adults. Rabbits can live seven to ten years, while chickens can live into their teens. The Kent County Health Department encourages adults to consider the longevity, as well as health and safety issues, if giving bunnies or chicks to children for Easter.

“After the Easter holiday is over, the Kent County Animal Shelter receives dozens of unwanted domesticated rabbits and several chickens,” according to Adam London, acting Health Officer for the Kent County Health Department. “Adults need to recognize that adopting or buying these cute little pets typically means a long-term commitment.” Pet rabbits have specific dietary needs and must live indoors. They can learn to be very social pets with routine handling and care.

Raising chicks and other poultry has become popular, but it has also led to an increase in *Salmonella* outbreaks in humans. Last year, there were eight outbreaks connected to live poultry in the U.S. *Salmonella* is common in baby poultry, and spreads from contact with the birds or their environments. Birds with *Salmonella* may appear healthy, but in humans, the bacteria can cause diarrhea, stomach cramping, fever and dehydration. Illness can last for up to a week, and can be serious in young children, older adults or those with weakened immune systems.

“If you handle a chick, be sure to wash your hands thoroughly when finished,” London says. “Don’t let children under the age of five handle chicks, or let kids snuggle or kiss chicks.” The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/media/dpk/2013/dpk-live-poultry-salmonella.html>.

The Kent County Health Department suggests giving children toy stuffed animals this Easter. Also, if giving or receiving plants for the holiday, make sure they stay out of the reach of any pets. Some items, such as lilies, can be toxic to pets. For a list, check out:

<http://www.aspc.org/Pet-care/poison-control/Plants>.

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KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and four satellite clinics located in Wyoming, Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit [www.accesskent.com/health](http://www.accesskent.com/health).